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TWO EXPOSTULATIONS.

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THE FIRST,

ON THE

T R U T H

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

THE SECOND,

ON THE

O B S E

OF THE

L O R D ' S

CHIEFLY ADDRESSED TO THE

HIGHER CLASSES OF THE COMMUNITY.

D U B L I N :

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M.DCCC.XCIX.



ON THE
T R U T H
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

WHOEVER is convinced of the truth of Christianity, must, of necessity, be anxiously affected by the peculiar circumstances under which that divine religion appears at this day in the world? During the eighteen centuries which have nearly elapsed since its commencement, can we find a period in which the religious character of mankind appeared so strangely unsettled, or in which they who feel the infinite importance of a conscientious restraint upon human conduct, had reason for greater solicitude?

The political leaders of a neighbouring country, have avowedly renounced Christianity ;

tianity ; and the admirers of the philosophy, and the policy of that country, throughout Europe and America, have discovered an almost general inclination to follow the pernicious example.—The *Metaphysician*, who hopes to excite admiration by the subtlety of his reasonings—the *Historian* who wishes to display his ingenuity by new methods of accounting for the events which he narrates—the *Politician* who aims at the abolition of existing attachments, in order to facilitate the establishment of his own favourite system, all, agree in making war on the Christian religion by every imaginable means of attack—by fallacious argument—by insidious misrepresentation—by sneering ridicule—by savage scurrility.

But why this unexampled effort to put down *Christianity*? Is it the love of virtue—is it a zeal for human happiness—that stimulates such a phalanx of foes? Christianity is that which teaches us to do to others as we



we would they should do unto us :—it is that which gives energy to *Conscience*, by opening to us the view of a judgment to come, and of rewards and punishments in a future life :—it is that which enjoins the necessity of regulated appetites and passions—of upright conduct and a pure heart, in order to acceptance with the Supreme Being :—it is that which cheers the disconsolate mourner, the broken-hearted victim of remediless distress, with the prospect of sweet peace and rich remuneration in a better world.

Such is Christianity.—Let its proofs be what they may—let the grounds on which it lays claim to divinity, be unquestionable or controvertible ;—still, is it not that which a good man, a lover of virtue, would naturally regard with some degree of predilection ? But could it possibly be conceived that any friend to human happiness should *bate* such a system—should pursue it with unqualified rancour ; and shew by every expression, that there is
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nothing he wishes so earnestly as to be able to annihilate its influence by making all men consider it an unfounded imposition on credulity? What is it in Christianity which excites this malevolence? The infidel who still acknowledges the obligations of morality, is indebted for his own best maxims to the Ethics of the Gospel. He cannot then with any shadow of consistency hold *that* in abhorrence which has made himself superior as a moralist to the most enlightened sages of the heathen world.—Is it the promise of a future life which is so hateful? This can hardly be supposed. The boldest unbelievers sometimes own that they “hope for happiness in a future state.” Is it then so desperately provoking that those principles of morality which all approve, should acquire additional force from the notion of a *divine sanction*—or that that futurity which is acknowledged to be the natural object of our warmest wishes, should be looked forward to with certainty, on the ground of a *divine declaration*? What could

could be conceived more desirable, abstractedly, than such a *Sanction* and such a *Declaration*? What so conducive to virtuous conduct as the *one*—so productive of solid, substantial peace of mind, as the *other*? The religion that offers both, in connexion with the most practical, the most popular, the most amiable code of morals that ever was given to the world, may, perhaps, even in an honest mind, be unhappily the subject of doubt—but how, in the name of Heaven, can it be an object of *hatred*, unless to the most depraved taste, the gloomiest temper, and the most insensible heart?

What have been the effects of Christianity upon society? Have they on the fullest trial been such as to lead a lover of his country to wish for its overthrow? Would any reasonable man desire to see the enormities of the ancient world brought back again? To see parents throwing out their children to perish—to see husbands casting off their wives at the impulse

impulse of every momentary caprice—to see the most unnatural, the most beastly practices acknowledged without reserve—nay, made a subject for popular verse by the most accomplished poets of the age? To what do we owe *our* happier manners—our greater decency in public life, our milder, easier, sweeter intercourse in private society? To what do we owe the acknowledged subordination of our laws to the eternal principles of justice and humanity? In fine, to what do we owe that unseen but most powerful influence, which silently pervading the mass, restrains the vices and animates the virtues of the great majority—making them good husbands—good wives—good fathers—good children—haters of murder—of perjury—of all the grosser crimes, from the apprehension that if they committed such things, the vengeance of Heaven would pursue them—I say to what do we owe our undeniable advantages in all these respects, but to the *Christian Religion*? Nay, is it not evident that these advantages

advantages are more perfectly enjoyed in proportion as that religion is left to its own innate purity, without the mixture of superadded dogmas or impositions? Yes—the infidel acknowledges by his conduct that in Christianity itself he cannot find matter for a successful attack, since he uniformly confounds with it those superstitious notions and practices, by which the weakness of human nature has concealed (in thinking to add to) its beauty and its excellence. He seldom if ever assails it as he finds it in the New Testament, but rather as it is taught by this or that church. Whatever faults or foibles he can detect, in the creed or rituals of discordant sects, these he artfully imputes to religion itself, and calls upon those who have abused it, to renounce it on account of their own abuses. He does not chuse to see that by this rule even *Natural Religion*, which he affects to reverence, ought also to be rejected. To *this*, all the superstitions of mankind may be attributed just as fairly

as the superstitions of professing Christians can be imputed to *Christianity*. What the deistical unbeliever objects on this ground to *our* religion, the Atheist equally objects to the Deist's belief of a God; and we have the same answer to give to *him* that *he* would give to an *Atheist*.

But is it on the ground of utility *only* that our Religion is to be defended? Have even its most acute or most industrious opponents been able in a single instance to shake the steadiness of its truth, or to adduce even a plausible apology for supposing that its records are not as firmly established, as historical testimonies can be? If any *honest* doubter of Christianity should happen to cast his eye on these lines, and if, convinced of the *usefulness* of the Christian Religion, he should feel a rising wish to be satisfied as to its *verity*, I will not send him to the volumes of even the most able controversialist.—He may doubtless peruse these with real advantage—But my earnest advice to him is,

is, in the first instance to read with candid, serious attention, the *New Testament* itself. In that wonderful book there are arguments of its own authenticity, which all the unbelievers in the world will never be able to overthrow. The jaundiced eye of prejudice that examines but to find fault, will not, can not discover *these*—But the ingenuous and well-formed mind will perceive in every page the vivid impress of simple truth—of unsuspecting integrity—of firm conviction—of boundless benevolence. The man of a good heart will feel, every where, the generous glow of a spirit like his own—a glow which hypocrisy could not have counterfeited—which fabrication never could have caught—which nothing short of known, witnessed, interesting facts could have inspired—and nothing but that immortal hope which these facts warranted, could have thus formed into a permanent habit. He will see that the events described were, such as to exclude the possibility of those who relate them being

themselves deceived—and he will equally be convinced that those who *so* relate them, never could have intended to deceive others—In a word, he will experience a sort of moral magnetism, acting upon his own best feelings with a potency of attraction not to be resisted.

Will the infidel object to all this, the possibility of the accounts not being written by those whose names they bear, but by designing men in a later period in order to perpetuate an imposition which had been successfully begun?—Let the man who suspects this—if he has either knowledge or taste—if he has either head or heart—*read*, and judge for himself. Let him consider the character of *Jesus Christ* alone and then say whether it is conceivable—that a fancy impregnated by fraud should have thus brought forth the most uniform master piece of heroic disinterested excellence that ever was exhibited to the world.

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The Gospels in which the actions and discourses of *Jesus Christ* are recorded, are one or other of two things, narrations of facts—or artful fabrications. Let us try the possibility of the latter supposition. Let us picture to ourselves a cunning impostor—sitting in his secret chamber, contriving and executing a plan of elaborate deception. Thus employed, with nothing at heart but gross imposition, he conceives such pure, such sublime, such godlike thoughts, as no philosopher had ever uttered, no poet had ever been able to furnish to his favourite hero:—He inculcates a method of worshipping the Supreme Being in which all that *Socrates* and *Plato* had taught in earlier, and all that *Cicero* had delivered in later days, on the subject of natural religion, is fully realized, and yet infinitely outdone; and he teaches a *charity* to man which transcends whatever had been thought of before, as much as the meridian sunshine exceeds the dim dawn of the morning. He does this with unex-
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amplified warmth—with a fervency of sentiment and language, such as the heart only can furnish—as mere labour never reached—and uniformly too—never once swerving from the line of benevolence—never sinking from the height of the subject. Such is the simple statement of the case—I appeal to all that is rational in man, whether there ever was, or *could be*, such an impostor in the world.

Next to the inimitable portrait of our Saviour, let the enquirer pay attention to that of *St. Paul*, as given in the Acts of the Apostles, and as deducible from the Epistolary writings which bare his name. Where was there ever more striking originality either of conduct or of sentiment than this extraordinary personage exhibits? As a philanthropist and a patriot—as a man of matchless enterprize and transcendant genius—as a combination of great and good qualities—undaunted fortitude—consummate prudence—unfailing delicacy—ardent affection, whether

whether viewed in his actions or his writings—where, I ask, is his parallel? Cold is that heart and depraved is that fancy which can contemplate such a picture without astonishment and veneration—and credulous beyond the common weakness of our nature, is that mind which can resolve it into forgery and fiction.—But, if *St. Paul's* character be *not* forged—the divinity of our religion follows by infallible consequence.

Lastly, while the lover of truth reads the *New Testament* and observes how the most important moral principles are *popularized* in it—how they are fitted to all understandings—applied to all situations and classes—made interesting to the imagination and penetrating to the heart—how the best dispositions are excited—the best hopes cherished—the most powerful motives applied—let him ask his own reason whether such an invaluable blessing to mankind

kind was not in every view what might have been expected from the God of all goodness—and whether the imagination could suggest a more suitable method of carrying it into execution.

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EXPOSTULATION, &c.

(☞ The Association for discountenancing Vice and promoting the Practice of Religion and Virtue, having expressed a wish that "An Expostulation, addressed to the higher Ranks of the Community, on the necessity of a more respectful Observance of the Lord's Day," should be drawn up; and the following being in consequence of that wish submitted to them and approved of—the Association think it their duty, earnestly to recommend it to the serious consideration of those to whose situation and conduct it is intended to apply.)

AT a time of unexampled alarm, an invitation to *reflection* cannot be deemed unseasonable. You are sensible that dangers of the most peculiar nature—unknown to your fathers—unapprehended till lately by yourselves, threaten destruction to every thing you hold valuable. The hazard is universal, but it rises infi-

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nitely

nitely with respect to *you*. The great prizes to be contended for, are chiefly in *your* possession. *You* are of course the objects of a more rancorous envy, and would, in the event of a successful insurrection, be the victims of a more enraged and sharper-sighted malevolence. On *you*, therefore, it is peculiarly incumbent to enquire what may yet be done, to save yourselves and the community. Placed as you are by Providence on the vantage-ground of society, your every movement is of importance. Wise and active exertions on your part may yet rescue your country; your folly, or even your supineness, must prove its inevitable ruin.

- A spirit of insubordination, spreading like a pestilence from county to county, and from province to province, has prepared too many amongst the lower classes for being the ready instruments of a few dark and malignant traitors. Whence has that spirit arisen? Various sources might be pointed out; but there is one without

without which it could never have existed:—It is the growing contempt of the multitude for the laws of God and the institutions of religion, which has made them proportionately regardless of the laws of civil society.

Ask your own understandings whether this is not the melancholy fact. Hitherto, whatever might have been the opinions or feelings of some amongst the higher ranks, the lower classes were in most instances checked by the power of conscience; they trembled at the idea of a false oath, because they believed there was a God to judge them; and they started back from death, not so much through the natural dread of dissolution, as from the apprehension of an after-reckoning, and an eternal recompense. But we have seen these restraints grow weaker; and in proportion as they have done so, what have been the consequences? Deliberate, systematic perjury—assassination justified on principle—and the pillage of

the rich openly urged upon the working-classes as a just right, and a legitimate reward. What, then, is to be looked for, should this boldness of impiety pervade the whole mass of the people? Would one adequate guard of property, one pledge of personal safety, survive the wreck of religion? or, is it to be hoped that state-policy, when thus deprived of its most powerful resource—or the force of armies, themselves necessarily infected with the general contagion, could restrain for any length of time, the bloody rapacity of an atheistical populace.

If you are sensible that such an expectation would be madness, and that to think of avoiding the evil by obstinately shutting your eyes against it, would be still greater madness, be entreated for your own sakes, and for the sake of your country, to put seriously to yourselves this awful question—“ *Ought those to be now the*
 “ ACTIVE DISSEMINATORS of ATHEISM,
 “ *who, in case of its general prevalence, must*
 “ *be.*

*" be its FIRST and MOST INFALLIBLE
" VICTIMS ?"*

Do you doubt whether there be just reason for such an enquiry ? Happy are you, if your own conduct furnishes no ground for it. But look around, and see whether numbers of the fashionable and the opulent are not at this moment as assiduous in spreading the contagion of profaneness, as if they deemed it the best security both for public and personal happiness ? And yet, if they were not infatuated by something like a diabolical delusion, might they not already trace in the blood-stained eyes of thousands on every side of them, the influence of their own poison, and almost the presage of their own destruction ?

The voluptuous indulgencies, or even the gross debaucheries of the rich and great, though infinitely injurious to the morals, did not necessarily destroy the principles, of those beneath them. Com-
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mon sense suggested, and experience shewed, that many who were hurried along by the torrent of temptation, might nevertheless in their hearts believe and tremble at the awful truths of religion. So long therefore as the multitude had room to harbour even such an opinion of their dissipated superiors, deeply as they must have been hurt by the contagion of example, it was still possible they might retain some latent principles of restraint and reformation: But when profligates of fashion have added to their other vices the most direct and studied impiety—when not content with corrupting the habits of the vulgar, they have proceeded to efface from their minds every impression of God and religion—exhibiting to their view every instance of proud profaneness, and forcing them to conclude, that in the opinion of the wise, devotion is contemptible—and Christianity only an object of insult and derision,—what can be expected, but that Atheism should spread even to the very dregs of the community, and
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that its *emancipated* profelytes should repay their instructors by practising their own lessons upon themselves?

To whom does this charge belong? To *you* amongst the higher ranks of society (whatever may be your character or conduct in other respects) who habitually neglect the public worship of God—who, in the view of your domestics, sit down to, and rise up from your richly furnished tables, without deigning, even by a gesture or a look, to acknowledge the supreme Benefactor—and who, unsatisfied with the dissipation of six days, habitually distinguish the seventh by some peculiar plan of amusement, or higher-wrought scene of revelry, as if the consciousness of insulting God and religion gave an additional zest to your gratification. Let your own reason decide, whether *you* are not, beyond comparison, the worst enemies of your country—and whether you are not more genuine traitors to its dearest

est interests, than even the dark conspirator, or the avowed rebel.

Look at those of your inferiors with whom you are best acquainted, *your own domestics*. Suppose the dread of punishment, and all the various energies of law, were suddenly suspended, could you hope that *they* would feel any restraint from a sense of morality or religion? In *your families*, they have met with much to pamper their appetites, to stimulate their vices, and to give them a relish for the whole of expensive luxury, except its few remaining decencies. But have they witnessed a single circumstance which could serve to remind them that there is a God? What conversations have they heard at your tables? Have they observed any law of religious decency so much as adverted to, except in the way of violation and insult? What, in a word, have your houses been to them, but schools of *Atheism*—yourselves the
uniform

uniform and indefatigable preceptors? And would they not profit by such lessons? Are they not, now, as prompt to imitate you, as, if an opportunity were afforded, they would be eager to supplant you? Already impelled as much by vanity, as by depravity, to be the missionaries of irreligion to all with whom they converse, they would then be proud to evince their own proficiency by a more overbearing insolence, and a more sanguinary ferocity.

If you need to have your conduct illustrated, and its effects exemplified to the full, look at the case of that accursed country, which, after having been the grand corrupter of Europe, seems now to be made its providential scourge. Who were the seducers *there*, of the lower classes? Who instructed them to despise God and religion—to laugh at future retribution—to trample on the Christian mysteries—and to unhallow the Christian sabbath? There is but one

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answer

answer—they were taught by the examples of their infatuated superiors, then the proudest, vainest, most voluptuous of men—now the most miserable outcasts on the habitable globe.

Treading in the same disastrous steps with equal obstinacy, but with far more aggravated guilt, to what can *you* look forward but the same or a still more melancholy catastrophe? Are you prepared for this? Can you with undisturbed composure anticipate rapine, assassination and massacre, or the yet more revolting prospect of a miserable survival? If you can—or should you, with a blindness of impiety, beyond that of *Robespierre* himself, see no connection between the spread of Atheism and your own and your country's ruin, you will, no doubt, go on to complete that *emancipation* of the popular mind, which you have so successfully begun. But if you have still the common feelings of humanity, you will, at this awful crisis, make at least some effort to counteract the
further

further progress of the mischief, and to prevent (while it may yet be prevented) the utter dissolution of all conscientious obligation.

If, awakened to rational reflection, you should ask what you ought to do. The answer is easy—Refrain immediately, and perseveringly from every instance of *direct, open irreligion*. Your own understandings will sufficiently point out to you what parts of your present conduct are inconsistent with the respect which, even on grounds of policy, you should pay to the religion of your country ; and whatever, in this view, you cannot justify to your own impartial judgment, have the courage, in spite of former habits or present disinclination, instantly to abandon it.

For example—can you deny the pernicious consequences, which have now been pointed out as arising from your habitual violation of the Lord's day ? You have taken

ken no care to conceal this from the multitude—the situation you hold in society made it impossible that it should be hid—the frivolous efforts to get rid of the forenoon, by all the varieties of what is well called *lounging*—the elaborate dissipation of the afternoon—the stated dinner-party,—the evening rout—the display of card tables—the late revel—and when the advance of the season has united with the “over-laboured lassitude” of voluptuousness, to suspend for a while the festivity of the capital, the almost uniform choice of Sunday as the day of removing to the country—these altogether have formed an exhibition, too uniform and too imposing, not to arrest the senses, and fill the imaginations of the populace. And, say yourselves, what must have been the consequence. Was not the inference of *your own utter contempt of every thing sacred* so inevitable, as to force itself on the most senseless of the mob? And can you imagine that every vulgar ruffian would not eagerly imbibe what tended, so directly,

to

to cherish his own depravity, and sanction his own profligacy?

Will you not then, in this single instance at least, consult your own security, and that of your country? The deluge of blood, which inundates the neighbouring nations, has not as yet reached *us*. But what can finally resist its overwhelming force, except the broad and solid dyke of popular conscientiousness? Do not then demolish this single safeguard? Rather hasten to repair the breaches which yourselves have made in it. Your return to *common sense* and *common decency* in this one particular, will have a powerful and universal influence:—an obstinate perseverance in your present practice will be fatal. Your profanation of Sunday defeats all enforcement of the laws, which have been made for its observance. The consequence must be, that it will melt—nay the fact is, that it is even now rapidly melting into the licence of common days
—and

—and that the very remembrance of it, and of all religion will be lost. Hitherto, even from the silence and solemnity alone of Sunday, the most ignorant of the multitude have been compelled to recollect the awful truths of religion—if this were wanting they would soon forget there was a God. Think then on the whole—threatened as you are with undescribed and infinite horrors—surrounded as you are with the victims of an insanity, the counterpart of your own,—but still possessing the means and the opportunity of prevention and security, think what you owe to your country and to yourselves! Remember that in all this you are only entreated not to be wilfully frantic—not to destroy with your own hands the sole guarantee of your peace. In a word, you are intreated, by the easy sacrifice of a few practices, as senseless as they are pernicious, to refrain from maddening the public mind—to cease from poisoning at their source the streams of popular opinion and
popular

popular conduct—that so, under the guard of a sober and conscientious public, you may see your country tranquil and secure, and yourselves enjoy—both personally and politically—a prolonged and honourable existence.

F I N I S.

